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INFO RUEHXK/ARAB ISRAELI COLLECTIVE PRIORITY
RHEHNSC/NSC WASHDC PRIORITY

C O N F I D E N T I A L JERUSALEM 000153

SIPDIS

NEA FOR FRONT OFFICE AND IPA; NSC FOR
ABRAMS/PASCUAL/RAMCHAND

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TAGS: PREL PGOV KDEM KWBG KPAL IS GZ

SUBJECT: FATAH GRASSROOTS LEADERS WANT TO "STAND UP" TO THE
GOI

Classified By: Consul General Jake Walles for reasons 1.4 (b) and (d).

¶1. (C) Summary. Fatah grassroots activists say Hamas will benefit politically from the Israeli operation in Gaza, diminishing Fatah's standing and forcing national reconciliation on Hamas' terms. They say the Palestinian public sees Fatah's choice of negotiations over armed struggle as having failed. They argue Fatah must "stand up" to Israel, stepping away from the PA and the efforts of PA security forces (PASF) to keep demonstrations from clashing with the IDF. End summary.

¶2. (C) Former PLC member and Nablus Fatah leader Husam Khader told PolSpec January 15 that Hamas will "certainly" benefit politically from its conflict with Israel and that PA President Mahmoud Abbas' (Abu Mazen's) only recourse after the IDF operation is reconciliation with Hamas. He said Fatah's popularity has declined because it failed to "stand up" to Israel, and that Fatah achieved nothing for Palestinians by replacing armed struggle with negotiations.

¶3. (C) Khader said that Fatah is associated in the public's mind with PASF efforts to control demonstrators in order to "protect" the IDF. This makes Fatah and the PA look like GOI "accomplices," he said. Khader said Fatah activists are starting to discuss how to differentiate their movement from the PA, believing that "if we don't do that, we stand to lose a great deal of public support the day after this aggression is over."

¶4. (C) Ahmad Ebwaini, a Fatah youth (al-Shabiba) activist in Ramallah, said the PA's image as a "collaborator" would remain in people's minds for years to come. He said the mood on the street in Ramallah now is very sympathetic to Hamas, while the PA is seen as "irrelevant" and incapable of bridging the gaps between the Egyptians and Hamas. He said the political damage done by the Israeli operation in Gaza is not limited to Abu Mazen, but extends to Fatah generally.

¶5. (C) The outcome of fighting in Gaza will create "tremendous political support" for Hamas in the West Bank, Ebwaini said. He said several Fatah grassroots leaders are planning a campaign against the PA for suppressing "freedom of speech" and banning demonstrations.

WALLES